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## 'Watchdog Committee' for the CIA?

The anticipated overhaul of the nation's intelligence activities in the aftermath of the Cuban fiasco naturally has revived interest in the old idea of a permanent congressional "watchdog committee" to operate in this field. Although there is plenty of room for vigorous differences of opinion about this approach, we are still inclined, on balance, to favor it.

The gist of the controversy can be summarized briefly. Like every nation obliged to guard its own security—a responsibility this country uniquely was able to ignore during a long century of isolation—the U.S. now recognizes a need to inform itself continuously and accurately about the activities and intentions of other governments and peoples. Some of this information—a considerable part, when the nations most hostile to us operate closed societies—has to be obtained by espionage and other clandestine activities.

These operations have to be conducted in absolute secrecy. The obvious reason is that the slightest revelation of intelligence sources can destroy their usefulness, endanger lives and cause all manner of international repercussions—as the U-2 case demonstrated. Both the need for an extensive peacetime intelligence operation and the requirements of secrecy were recognized by Congress in the National Security Act of 1947 and the Central Intelligence Act of 1949, which created and defined the authority of the CIA.

But such secrecy in a governmental operation is inherently incompatible with the democratic process. Something of the incongruity of the CIA's position can be seen in such provisions of the 1949 law as one specifically exempting it from any requirements in other acts for publication or disclosure of the "organization, functions, names, official titles, salaries or numbers of personnel em-

ployed"; and another directing the bureau of the budget to "make no reports to the Congress" on these matters. Obviously, such an unprecedented grant of authority and surrender of legislative surveillance is an open invitation to all kinds of waste and inefficiency, inadequate performance that could endanger the nation's safety, and even a possible tendency toward usurpation of authority by an insulated bureaucratic apparatus operating as a "state within the state."

The questions about the CIA's role in Cuba and the consequent fresh awareness of these dangers already have produced two responses by President Kennedy. He has called upon Gen. Maxwell Taylor and Attorney General Robert Kennedy to conduct an investigation of all our intelligence activities—at least a dozen major federal departments and agencies operate in this field, although all channel their output through CIA—presumably with a view to fixing responsibilities in the Cuban af-

fair and considering the need for administrative reforms.

He has reconstituted the membership of the Board of Consultants on Foreign Intelligence Activities, evidently in order to revitalize the citizens committee created in 1956, on recommendation of the Hoover Commission, to report to the President at least semi-annually on "the quality of the foreign intelligence provided to the executive branch of the government." With Dr. James R. Killian of M.I.T. recalled as chairman, the group will resume operations "under broadened terms of reference."

The question now is whether these internal improvements are sufficient or whether there is still need for the congressional watchdog committee to restore in some measure in the intelligence field the traditional system of checks and balances between the executive and legislative branches. It should go without saying that any such committee would have to be hand-picked and tightly bound to secrecy, in the fashion of the select Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, which long has operated in an almost equally sensitive area without compromising security. Although congressional review of intelligence activities might be even more dangerous, because it would disclose even more dramatic and hence newsworthy secrets to the committee's members, fear of unauthorized use of information need not be a decisive obstacle.

Senator Mansfield, D-Mont., now the administration's own majority leader, has urged the watchdog proposal for years. It is being recalled that President Kennedy himself once voted for it when he was in the Senate. There may now be a real possibility, therefore, of attempting to modify one of the most fundamental contradictions injected into the American democratic system by the pressures of the Cold War.